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USING OUR GARDEN FOR HEALTH AND FITNESS

It is well known amongst health professionals that gardening, as well as providing great satisfaction and achievement, is also a great way to have a regular aerobic workout. When we garden, we are physically active and encouraging children to garden on a regular basis, is one way of helping maintain good health. The other major benefit is that children will eat food they grow – especially vegetables, that they will not normally eat by choice. This develops good eating habits and promotes health.

ACTIVITY ONE – HOW DOES GARDENING KEEP US ACTIVE

- Tell the students that health professionals say that gardening is one of the best activities we can do to help keep us healthy. What reasons can they give for this?
- Have the students brainstorm a list of all the actions that they will use when they are gardening, **eg**
 - lifting - pulling - walking - stretching - crouching
 - bending - digging - crawling - twisting ...
- Get students in pairs to mime all these gardening actions. Can they work out which muscles and parts of their bodies are being exercised during these actions? Challenge the class to come up with several good and/or creative reasons why gardening is as good or has more advantages over going to a gym for a workout, **eg** it exercises all our body, it is in the fresh air, we can grow healthy things to eat as well and we gain satisfaction from what we have done.



ACTIVITY TWO – GARDENING SAFELY

- Tell students that when people exercise at a gym, they are shown how to use the equipment safely and that this is also true of gardening. Have students suggest sensible steps that should be taken when 'working out' in their gardens, **eg**
 - sunblock, wide brimmed hat, long sleeved shirt, long trousers to avoid sunburn
 - avoid the warmest times of the day when gardening
 - warm up with slow stretching exercises before gardening and do basic back stretches during gardening
 - rotate the tasks – after 15 minutes of raking, swap for pruning or weeding
 - take breaks in the shade and drink lots of water
 - try not to get in long and awkward positions
 - always wear gloves and enclosed shoes, especially when cutting lawns
- Invite a gardener to talk to the class and demonstrate the correct, safe and efficient use of common gardening tools.

ACTIVITY THREE – THINKING CREATIVELY

- Walk around the school garden and challenge students to come up with ways they could use or things they could do or add that would give their garden workout a little more 'sparkle', **eg**
 - a step could be used/put in for step-ups every 10 minutes
 - a rope attached to a tree for climbing
 - add a decorative stepping stone path for hopping practice.

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GROW**

